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ABSTRACT

As a practicum project, an elementary school counselor developed and implemented a parent education program centered on the use of parents as models and peer facilitators for other parents. Based upon a survey of parents' self-professed needs, the program focused on parenting skills designed to help children avoid such high-risk behaviors as alcohol and drug use. Workshops were held for five parent volunteers to acquaint them with PRIDE Parent Training's Parent to Parent video course on alcohol and drug abuse prevention. These parents would then use the videotapes and supporting materials with other neighborhood parents in peer group meetings. Although no peer classes were held, several were scheduled for the following school year, and parental involvement in school activities increased due to interest in the program. (Three appendixes provide copies of the parent survey, along with program evaluation forms in English and Spanish.) (MDM)

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ED 371 847

Involving Parents as Partners in a Peer Facilitation Model of Parenting

by

Kathleen R. Buntin

Cluster 52A

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Practicum I Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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This practicum, *Involving Parents as Partners in a Peer Facilitation Model of Parenting*, took place as described.

Trudy Mulcock

Trudy Mulcock
Principal, Emerson Elementary School
940 West University
Mesa, AZ 85201

4/20/94

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Kathleen R. Buntin under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

March 16, 1994
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Roberta Silfen mrs
Roberta Silfen, Ph. D.

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Abstract

An elementary school counselor looks at ways to increase parental involvement and to facilitate parent's acquisition of skills using a peer facilitator model of parenting. Based on the results of a survey of parents' self-professed needs, the counselor chose to focus on those parenting skills designed to help parents help their children avoid high-risk behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use.

Using PRIDE Parent Training's Parent to Parent materials, the counselor set up a parenting program at her school based upon the PRIDE model of training parents in basic group facilitation skills and in the use of the materials. These parents then use the PRIDE materials to work with other neighborhood parents on skills designed to help those parents help their children avoid specific high-risk behaviors.

Strengths of the PRIDE program include involving parents in a meaningful way, using a parent-peer model, involving the parents as facilitators, not "experts," The program is flexible, allowing parenting classes to be taught at almost any location or time. It begins to build a support network and helps to unite the school with the community. The program is culturally sensitive and can be adapted to meet specific needs. It empowers parents and families by treating parents as equals and partners. It focuses on small groups for greater participation and sense of belonging. It is preventive rather than remedial, focusing on the strengths found in families, rather than on weakness.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The Setting

In 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower was in the White House, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez were America's favorite couple, and the nation was willing to "leave it to Beaver." The cold war was raging and the baby boomers were having a startling impact on the nation's schools by the fact of their sheer numbers. Schools were on overload and split-day, double sessions were not exceptional. School buildings were being erected at lightning speed. One of those was a red brick elementary school in a small southwestern community, a school of seven buildings, including the multi-purpose room and the library, all built in a single story along outdoor walkways. Windows on the northern walls made the school open, sunny and cheerful. The school, large and modern, was a credit to its 1950's community of middle-class families.

In the almost forty years since then America has changed. One president was assassinated; another resigned in shame. Lucy and Desi -- along with a large percentage of Americans -- divorced. Beaver Cleaver grew up to be a single father. The nation underwent major social revolutions that altered the face of the culture, including the chemical revolution, the sexual revolution, and the entertainment revolution (Oliver, 1987).

The neighborhood around the little red brick school changed along with the nation. Small apartments were built in the back of formerly single family homes. Low rent apartment complexes were built. A small trailer park filled an empty corner. Three group homes for abused and neglected children opened their doors. Because rents were low, many low income families moved to the area. Some of these families were of cultural minority; some spoke little or no English. Because apartments and trailer parks concentrate large numbers of people in small areas, the numbers of students in the little red school increased dramatically. The school still serves students in grades Kindergarten through 6.

The school building itself now sports nearly a dozen portable classrooms, like mushrooms on the lawn of the former playground. Windows are crisscrossed with iron bars to discourage vandalism and theft. Security alarms guard the doors and windows of the buildings housing high tech, high cost equipment. Teachers are discouraged from working at the school alone in the early morning or evening, or on weekends.

However, even with the monumental changes of the last forty years, some things have remained constant, giving this school population a unique persona. While the neighborhood has changed, there is a still a core group of original families who are very stable. Some of these families are in the third generation living in this neighborhood, in some cases, in the very home built by a grandparent.

The staff is also an interesting mix. Some of the staff members have worked at that school for over fifteen years. In fact, two of the staff members went to that school as children in 1954, then came back to teach as adults, never having moved from their childhood homes. Some of these veteran teachers have had a tough time adjusting to the dramatic demographic

changes in the neighborhood and, therefore, the school's population. Several of the older staff members have taken early retirement within the past few years, radically changing the make up of the school's personnel. Newer staff members hired within those years are, for the most part, very optimistic, energetic and enthusiastic. Their willingness to try new ideas provides an interesting counterbalance to the experience and caution of the older teachers.

As with many other schools of today, both veteran and novice teachers struggle with the changes in the families from which their students come. The climate of the school has changed drastically, precisely because the assumptions of the 1950's -- that most kids come from intact families with parents actively involved in parent and teacher organizations -- are no longer valid.

The parents tend to fall into three groups. There is a resistant group of parents who seem totally uninterested in what is happening with their children. They tend to be nonsupportive of the school and rarely attend school sponsored activities. Fortunately, these parents seem to be in the minority. At the opposite end of the continuum is a small group of parents who are very involved and who spend a great deal of time on campus working in various capacities. Again, this is a small percentage. The majority of the parents seem interested in their children and in the school, but most of these parents are less involved than perhaps even they would like to be.

As the school counselor, this writer has a variety of responsibilities to the students, their families, and the school staff. She works with the children one-on-one as they are referred by their parents, teachers, or when they, on occasion, self-refer. She works with children who have similar presenting problems in small group settings. When time allows, she does large group

guidance in the classroom.

Additionally, she works as a consultant with parents, teachers and other staff. She conducts staff development inservice trainings on a variety of topics and has, in the past, taught parenting skill classes in the evening. She also does considerable work at the district level, particularly on issues dealing with early intervention for at-risk students and prevention curriculum development for tobacco, alcohol and other drug prevention. Finally, she does all of this by noon each day. Afternoons are spent repeating the process at a neighboring school of similar size and challenge. Although the writer has a strong commitment to a proactive, preventive model of elementary guidance and the belief that home and family have a primary impact on the success of a child in school, it does not always work out that way in reality. The changing socioeconomic make-up of the neighborhood, as well as other demographic considerations such as single parent families, have had a major impact on the shift from a proactive, preventive model of counseling to a reactive, crisis intervention model today.

Chapter II

Study of the Problem

The Problem

Because of the devastating impact recent sociological changes have had on the home and family, many of the families at this school are in real need of support and assistance in working with their children. Yet, in the past, when parenting skills classes have been offered by the school counselor, they have been poorly attended. There are several factors that contribute to this problem. The parents who *do* come are usually those who are doing a fairly competent job already -- as measured by their children's achievement and behavior. They are also generally that same handful of parents who participate in P.T.O., work on the playground, or volunteer to help -- in other words, those parents who are already strongly committed to their children's education.

On the other end of the continuum are the parents who seem to be most in need of such help -- as measured by their children's achievement or behavior. These parents are the ones least likely to attend. However, many of these same parents *do* tend to call on the school counselor in the heat of a crisis to deal with their problems one-to-one. Unfortunately, this is nearly impossible to do because of the role overload described in chapter one (i.e.

two schools of nearly 1,000 students each, and approximately 1,300 families).

Even if the counselor had the time to work with several hundred children, working with a child alone without also working with the entire family is rarely more than minimally successful. The fact is that a counselor in a school setting is not in a position to do marriage and family therapy. The problem becomes apparent: The families who appear most in need of counselor intervention are not taking advantage of that help when it is offered via a program that is feasible for presentation by a single counselor (i.e. attending a parenting skills class).

Hard Data: The School

Data taken from office records at this particular school indicate that the majority of parents do not participate regularly in traditional parent/school activities. For example, the school has a student enrollment of over 950 students. A recent count of oldest and only children revealed that these students come from approximately 650 different families. Despite these numbers, the school's P.T.O president indicated that average monthly attendance at P.T.O. meeting is about 12. The school's volunteer coordinator says that the average number of parents who volunteer regularly is about 12.

The school counselor's attendance records show that previously held parenting classes attracted about 8 parents. The one exception was a class co-taught by the writer and a psychologist *who also happened to be the parent of one of the students.* It appears that being one of the parents was a stronger drawing card than being a psychologist because other classes taught by outside experts, including other psychologists, were just as poorly attended as those taught solely by the school counselor.

When teachers were asked how many of their students' parents attended parent/teacher conferences in November, 1992, twenty-four classroom teachers responded as did four special education teachers. Total number of children in the twenty-four regular classrooms was 728. Of this number, 494 attended November conferences, or just a little over two thirds. Out of 29 special education students, 13 parents attended, nearly half.

Hard Data: The Parents

In order to add to this data information gleaned from the parents themselves, this writer took a needs assessment survey of school parents during the first week of November, 1992. Of the nearly 1,000 surveys sent home with the children, nearly 200 were returned. While this is slightly under 20% of the actually surveys, the return represented nearly 30% of the school's 650 families.

The results seem to support the data taken from school records. Seventeen parents reported regular attendance at monthly P.T.O. meetings. However, 157 said they regularly attend parent-teacher conferences. (At 84%, this is higher than the actual numbers reported by the teachers. Whether or not this difference is significant has not been determined.) Ninety parents reported regular attendance at school sponsored social activities while only 22 said they have attended school sponsored parenting classes when offered.

In that same survey, parents were asked how likely it would be that they would attend parenting classes, if offered. They were given several topics from which to choose, including helping their child with academics, learning about child development, practicing communication skills, working to improve a child's

behavior, and learning some ways to help their child avoid the high risk behaviors of drug abuse, gangs, and so on. The response was heartening overall, but the single most often chosen topic was the last: avoiding the high risk behaviors. More than half of the parents responding -- 108 -- said they would be very likely to attend such a class and an additional 54 said they might attend such a class.

Because parents often stay away for purely logistical reasons, the parents surveyed were asked what practical problems might get in the way of their participation in school sponsored events. The biggest problem mentioned was child care for younger children. The reason given secondly was that of time and energy. A few said that transportation was a problem and an even smaller group said that cost was a factor.

Possible Causes

There are many likely causes to the problem of lack of parental involvement. In the past forty years, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of single parent families. Even two parent families are likely to be two income families, leaving large numbers of so called "latch key children." The divorce rate has continued to rise since the 1950's and many of today's children have been through more than one divorce with their parent. Reoccurring economic problems have added to the stress level of families. The current recession has put tremendous pressure on even two income families and America's children have become America's poor (McCune, 1986). As many parents struggle with financial pressures, draining their time, energy, and resources, little is left for conscious, quality parenting.

In this writer's experience, parents also seem confused by the barrage of "how to parent" information flooding the media. Parents wading through the muddle can come away feeling even less of a parent than before they began. Discouragement squelches further desire to learn. Many parents, unnerved by the recent high levels of awareness regarding child abuse, are afraid to parent. They seem stuck in a quandary of, "If I can't spank, I can't discipline." Society itself has few clear-cut moral and ethical values and parents attempting to instill either in their children often feel they are in the trenches alone.

Searching the Literature

Parents and the School: An Adversarial Relationship?

A search of the literature indicates that other professionals have seen similar problems. In the late 1970's educators were noting a lack of parental participation. Harris (1978) felt that parent's failure to participate could go back to their own negative attitudes about school based on their childhood experiences. He said that those who do try to have an influence on the school feel that the teachers see them as being intrusive nuisances.

That same year, Ciriscuclo (1978) said that parents hesitate to participate fully because the approach of the school personnel tends to be negative, often confrontational. He cautioned educators to beware of an adversarial approach and warned that such negative attitudes on the part of a few parents can be contagious, contaminating the climate of the entire school.

Comer and Haynes (1991) said that many of the programs planned to involve parents fail to take into account the entire system. They tend to be what Senge (1990) calls "snapshots" of the problem -- isolated quick fixes rather than

long range, ecologically based plans. Such thinking is not only limited in scope, it fails to involve the parents in activities which the parents see as meaningful (Comer & Haynes). This very issue may account for the fact that the parents surveyed by this writer in November of 1992 reported such limited attendance at P.T.O., but much greater participation in parent/teacher conferences. Parents may feel that the traditional approaches lack relevance.

From the teachers' point of view, they sometimes express frustration that they can't *require* that parents become involved with the school (University of Hawaii , Manoa, 1985). According to Downing (1991), when one asks teachers about the problem of parental involvement, one is likely to get two stereotypical answers: "The ones who need help the most are the least likely to come" and "Once the teacher meets the parent, the teacher understands why the child has problems." Merina (1990) seems to concur that when a child is having serious problems at school, it is very likely that there are problems in the home. It is easy to see that such attitudes on both sides of this issue can create divisive and sometimes even adversarial relationships instead of a functional partnership between home and school.

Prevention vs. Intervention

Another problem that surfaced frequently in the literature was the question of *prevention* versus *intervention*. Dealing with a child and his family in a moment of crisis is clearly an intervention. Teaching a group of parents specific parenting skills to help minimize crises is clearly an example of prevention. While most professionals agree that prevention is far less costly and more successful than intervention (and is, in fact, the basic philosophy behind special education laws), many give only "lip service" to the idea (Coyne,

1991). Coyne found that counselors, who, perhaps, tout the benefits of prevention the most, in reality spend most of their time in remediation/intervention. The reasons for this are many. Perhaps the most compelling is that it is difficult to prove one has prevented anything. If the event *did not* occur,

how can anyone say it *would* have occurred without the preventive program applied? While research is being done in this area, many professionals still claim a lack of empirical evidence as reason to doubt the efficacy of prevention efforts (Coyne, 1991).

A second reason given for doing intervention rather than prevention is that it is easier to get help for those who are already dysfunctional in some way (Coyne, 1991). In fact, even though our special education laws were written to be preventive or, at the very least, early interventive, in practice one must label the child defective in some way in order to qualify him for special services. Such reasoning tends to keep school personnel in a knee-jerk model when delivering services. This is unfortunate, particularly for the school counselor, if for no other reason than that the school counselor's role is by definition proactive in nature. Recent years have seen counselors who practice in school settings being called upon to do more and more clinical work, which is not their role (Coyne, 1991).

With the recent availability of government funds for at-risk prevention, the pendulum may be swinging back in that direction. Even when it does, however, there are no guarantees that the preventive programs designed to help the kids will include the parents. This is a drastic oversight. Children who are most at risk very often come from homes which are at risk. This includes both families living below the federal poverty level and the "cornucopia kids" from

overindulgent homes (Thornburg, Hoffman, & Remeika, 1991).

Society

America has undergone major sociological changes since the 1950's. These have included such immense changes as the sexual revolution, the chemical (drug) revolution, and the entertainment revolution (Oliver, 1987). These changes and others have literally reconfigured America.

In the last forty years, Americans have redefined the family as well. The number of divorces has exploded. Female-headed single parent families have doubled since 1959 (Thornburg, *et al*, 1991; McCune, 1986). The implications are almost endless. Poverty rates for these families are higher than in two parent homes. This situation has moved America's poverty-stricken majority from its elderly to its children (Berger, 1991; McCune, 1986).

Not only has the nuclear family been impacted by change, so has the extended family. High mobility has left families on little islands, far away from the support and sense of community provided by the extended family (Raines, 1992). In addition, the other traditional social support groups, such as the church or the neighborhood community, are often lacking as well. This leaves families on stress-driven overload with little respite. This in turn contributes to the families' inability to raise and nurture their children (Powell, 1991). In fact, both Raines and Powell indicate that these family-related changes have been so rapid and so complex that they have had a major negative impact on parents' financial and emotional resources to raise their children.

Several authors studied further state that even families with two parents are often two income families, leaving little time or energy to adequately parent (Raines, 1992; Berger, 1991; Powell, 1991). These problems are

compounded further by negative (albeit nostalgic) comparisons between today's family and the idealized "Dick and Jane" family of the 1950's (Powell, 1991). The "blame" for this situation is often placed on the shoulders of the individual family. However Thornburg, Hoffman, and Remeika (1991) state that the societal changes are too massive to lay the blame on the individual family. Rather, the blame must be shared by society as a whole. These are not the Jones' children. They are our children.

Contributing factors that add to the problem are increased use of alcohol and other drugs, increased child abuse, increased school drop out rates (Raines, 1992), increased numbers of teen pregnancies and, consequently, very young parents (Raines, 1992; Berger, 1991), and continued cultural inequalities and poor race relations (Berger). Society is placing a far greater responsibility on the school to reach out to these families (Berger).

The Consequences of Ignoring the Problems

Some may ask, "Why should the schools be asked to pick up the burden?" Educators have known for a long time that when parents fail to support their child's education, it has a deleterious effect on that child's success in school (Olmsted, 1991). That, in itself, could be reason enough. However, there are even more far reaching consequences. If nothing happens to help individual families deal with these kinds of problems, the entire society must pay in terms of financial support; in the cost of rehabilitation, institutionalization or incarceration; in the loss of potential labor; and in the loss of potential future tax payers (Thornburg, *et al*, 1991).

Yet schools tend to be resistant to change. According to Cochran and Dean (1991), the societal changes that have had such a massive impact on

the family have left the schools having to deal with a drastically altered clientele. Because so many of the problems faced by today's children are problems whose origins rest within the family system, remedies for the child's problems, by definition, also must be remedies for the child's family. This would seem to suggest greater parental involvement rather than less, yet the trend toward greater involvement on the part of the parent seems to be slower to reach the schools than it has been to reach other social institutions (Cochran and Dean). They suggest at least two factors that impact this situation: The first is that the parents lack an advocate in the system. The second is that schools tend to operate using a "deficit" model, in other words, something must be wrong or defective before the school can provide help.

The Parents' Part

Lest this sound like blame placing, the schools are not alone in their resistance to change. Parents, too, resist being asked to do things differently. Schaefer (1991) found that authoritarian parenting is related to low achievement in the child. Such a parenting style includes what Schaefer calls "deification of parent." Authoritarian parenting is often intrusive in the child's life and may seek to break the child's will. Such families are usually, by definition, closed systems. That need to exclude any outside influence is reflected in a resistance on the part of the parent to participate in any program which might require change of the status quo.

This is clearly a problem with no easy answers, but answer it we must. A few years ago Barbara Bush was asked, as America's First Lady, to address the graduates of a prominent university for women. During that address, Mrs. Bush spoke of the war on drugs being fought in this nation. She said that this war

would not be won (or lost) in the White House, but in the houses -- homes -- of Americans. This concept has applicability beyond the war on drugs. Rather, it seems to speak to all of America's social "wars." As a nation, we will win them or lose them by what we do within our families.

Chapter III

Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Expected Outcomes

As stated in the last chapter, many families today are in need of support and assistance in working with their children because of the tremendous sociological changes of the past forty years. However, when parenting skills classes are offered, they are poorly attended, particularly by those parents who seem most in need of such help, as evidenced by their child(ren)'s academic and or behavioral problems at school. The goal of this project was to have parents attend parenting skills classes in general. In addition, it was hoped that some of the parents who did attend would be those who do not normally attend traditional school-sponsored events, such as P.T.O. meeting, or those who feel that their children have academic or behavioral problems.

It was anticipated that more parents would attend parenting classes as measured by a simple sign-in sheet at every class offered. In the needs assessment survey done in November, 1992, 22 parents reported regular attendance at school-sponsored parenting classes. Counselor records indicate that the average attendance at such classes was more often 8. Because this writer did not necessarily want large numbers of parents at any individual class,

in order to increase active class participation, she did not necessarily aim for higher average attendance at any one class. However, she did aim for higher overall attendance, meaning more than 22 parents would participate in a parenting skills class during the implementation phase of this practicum.

It was further anticipated that at least one third of the parents who did attend would be those who do not normally attend more traditional school activities, such as P.T.O. On the November, 1992, survey, only 17 parents reported regular attendance at P.T.O. meetings. While it was not expected that attendance at parenting classes would increase P.T.O. meeting attendance, it was expected that some of those attending parenting classes would indicate the fact that they do not normally attend P.T.O. meetings. This was to be measured by an anonymous, written evaluation to be completed by each parent who attends a parenting class. These evaluations were to be distributed at the end of each class. Because parent participation in parent-teacher conferences at this school has been quite good, it was not anticipated that the parenting-skills classes would have an impact on that attendance in either direction.

A final expected outcome was that, of those parents attending parenting classes, at least one third would indicate that they perceived their child(ren) as having academic or behavioral problems at school. This, also, was to be measured by a specific question on the anonymous written evaluation. That evaluation also was to include a question as to the individual parent's expectation for the parenting class and whether or not that expectation was met, in the form of new information, increased skills, increased sense of support, and so forth.

Method

Results of these evaluations were to be tallied by labeling, then counting, responses. Because there may have been unanticipated results -- as mentioned by parents in the "Other comments" portion of the survey -- the actual format used for doing the tally was to be set up after all the evaluation sheets had been returned. In this way all of the parents' comments would be taken into consideration when analyzing the results. Final results were to be reported using descriptive statistics. Most would be reported as raw numbers although percentages were to be computed to determine if one third of the respondents do not normally attend PTO or if one third see their child(ren) as having problems at school.

Chapter IV

Solution Strategy

Possible Solutions

In searching for possible solutions to this problem, the writer looked first to the experiences of others through the professional literature. While there were many and varied approaches to increasing parental involvement, these studies seemed to share some common features. It was to these common features that the writer looked.

The Changing Role of the School

Underscoring all of these suggestions was the idea that the school must begin to broaden its role. Rather than being an isolated entity concerned only with the traditional "Three R's," the school of the 1990's must serve and be an integral part of the community, a broad-based resource center of an "ecological" or "systems" model (Raines, 1992; Powell, 1991; Thornburg, *et al*, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Berger, 1991; Senge, 1990). According to Powell (1991), schools are in an excellent position to deliver a wide variety of services because school buildings are located in almost every neighborhood and

because schools interface with a very large segment of the community. Children may not get to the doctor or the counselor in the community, but the child will have access to the school nurse and school counselor or psychologist (where such services are offered) simply by virtue of the legal mandate that all children, between the ages of eight and sixteen, must go to school. Coyne (1991) adds to this the fact that the school has traditionally been a natural support system and, with systems thinking, could logically be called upon to strengthen other natural support systems, like the family.

In order to broaden its base of influence, the school must make some shifts in some very basic paradigms of education. First, schools must begin to see the reality of the sociological changes over the past few decades. Painful as it may be, educators must deal with the fact that today's school is working with a vastly different clientele than the school of the Baby Boomers' childhoods. There is a tendency for educators to idealize the 1950's family (Powell, 1991). That is an unrealistic model by which to judge today's families and it gets in the way of dealing with the very real needs of today's children and their families.

Secondly, the schools need to move away from a deficit model of service delivery. Admittedly, this will be difficult with the need to label a child "disabled" in some way in order to qualify him for certain services. However, as long as educators use a "sick" model for service delivery, they will continue to focus on remediation. According to Powell (1991), schools need to move to a "wellness" model and to cease trying to identify what families *don't* have -- what Powell calls "the components of the problem" (p.309) -- and begin to focus on what children *need* to be healthy and happy. Much more is to be gained in "good finding" (Clarkin, 1989), then building on those found strengths, than is to be

gained in focusing almost exclusively on weaknesses.

Schools need to be sensitive to cultural differences (Oliver, 1992; Powell, 1991; Coyne, 1991). Part of the "good finding" mentioned above (Clarkin, 1989) is to find and build on the strengths of parents of differing cultural backgrounds. For example, at a recent P.T.O. meeting held at the school that is the subject of this practicum, invitations to the meeting were sent out in Spanish to the parents of students in the schools' ESL program, with the promise that an interpreter would be provided. Several Spanish speaking parents attended -- a first at that school -- and indicated, through the interpreter, that they just had been waiting to be asked. The literature supports such an approach as the nation moves into the next century when the majority will be the combined minority (McCune, 1986).

Related to that idea is the fact that communication with parents by the school should be frequent, positive, and written in a way that neither talks up to or down to the parents. According to Harris (1978) the goals are to put the parents at ease and to make the school more accessible to parents, remembering that many parents avoid participation in school-sponsored events because of negative feelings leftover from their own childhood experiences.

Parents also tend to avoid activities which they consider to be irrelevant. This was noted by Ciriscuclo in 1978, when he also stated that teachers should avoid jargon and "educationese," giving parents hands-on activities and specific suggestions, not theoretical rambling. If that was true fifteen years ago, it is certainly true today, when parents' time and energy are being pulled in so many other directions. Parents are like other adult learners and, as one community college teacher noted, adult learners "vote with their feet." If what they hear isn't worth their time today, they won't return tomorrow.

The Role of the Parents

Schools need to involve the parents as active partners in the education of their children (Oliver, 1992; Downing & Downing, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Berger, 1992). This involvement should begin early, not only in terms of beginning when the child first enters the public school, but also early in terms of intervening quickly the minute a problem occurs so that the problem can be nipped in the proverbial bud.

Early involvement -- such as offering parenting skills classes at the elementary school level -- could help young parents learn the skills and responsibilities of parenthood (Berger, 1991; Schaefer, 1991). Information shared with young parents could include normal child development and a description of the skills needed by the child to be successful in school (Schaefer).

Powell (1991) suggests that one way to make parenting classes more palatable is to promote the idea of classes as parent support, rather than parent education. This approach minimizes the idea that some "expert" is going to teach them how to be a parent, which idea alludes to the unspoken judgment that parents are incompetent to raise their own child (Oliver, 1992; Powell, 1991).

Both Oliver (1992) and Powell (1991) recommend using a parent group leader rather than an "expert" teacher to facilitate the parenting class. There are several advantages to such an approach:

- It treats parents as partners.
- It makes use of parents' talents (Criscuclo, 1978).
- It empowers parents (Bratlinger, 1991).

- It uses a peer approach to group facilitation (Olmsted, 1991).
- It uses "hands-up" rather than "hand-out" approach (Binford & Newell, 1991).

Olmsted (1991) and Merina (1990) both suggest using peer parents in other ways, such as making home visits. This would be particularly advantageous when parents of a certain cultural group were visited by others who can speak from that culture, as was the case previously mentioned of inviting Spanish speaking parents to P.T.O. in their own language.

By using a parenting group leader more as a facilitator and less as an expert, (Oliver, 1992; Powell, 1991) parents can build on the feeling of being among their own. Such parent meetings could build a sense of community within the group. Group meetings could connect parents with other families who share similar concerns and challenges, thus reducing the sense of social isolation experienced by so many families today (Bratlinger, 1991).

Oliver (1992) and Powell (1991) both recommend that parenting class time be more for discussion than formal lecture. This would mean the parent group leader might use some prepared curriculum to introduce the basic concept to be taught, but would spend most of the time allowing group participants to discuss the concept and how it applies to their families. This approach would help foster a sense of relevance for those parents in attendance. As was shown by the needs assessment survey done in November, 1992, by this writer, parents will participate in those activities that are seen as important to them and to their children.

Report of Action Taken

Spring, 1993

The writer involved parents directly in helping to develop a parenting program for the school. She contacted all those parents who indicated on the November survey that they were willing to actively participate in such an endeavor. During telephone conversations with those parents, the counselor discussed the idea of using parents as peer group facilitators. Eight parents expressed an interest in being trained to work with other parents in such an endeavor. The decision was made to use PRIDE Parent Training's Parent to Parent materials. Several factors were considered in making this choice. First, the counselor herself had training and experience in using the Parent to Parent materials and is an authorized master facilitator. This was important because she had to train the parent volunteers to use the materials before they could use them in working with other parents. Second, the Parent to Parent program met many of the criteria shown by the research to be effective:

- It involves parents in a meaningful way.
- It uses a parent-peer model.
- It involves those parents as facilitators, not "experts".
- Parenting classes can be taught at almost any location or time.
- It begins to build a support network within the community.
- It focuses on small groups for greater discussion/participation.
- It is preventive or early interventive.
- It is positive, focusing on strengths rather than weakness.

- It helps to unite the school with the community.
- It is culturally sensitive.
- Presentation can be adapted to meet specific needs.
- It empowers parents and families.
- It treats parents as equals and partners.
- It is a "hand-up" not "hand-out" program (Binford & Newell, 1991).

A third reason for choosing Parent to Parent was that the program had been acquired by the school district for which the writer works as part of its drug-free schools program and, as such, was available for use.

The fourth reason for choosing this program is the ease with which lessons can be presented. The program is based on eight video modules so that, while parent facilitators set the stage and lead the discussions, the actual presentation of information is done via the video modules. Finally, the Parent to Parent materials were designed to help parents specifically deal with issues revolving around the use of alcohol and other drugs and the drug culture, the subject most requested by parents responding to the 1992 survey.

After speaking with the parent volunteers, the writer, working through the district prevention specialist, set up a workshop to train the parents in the use of the Parent to Parent materials and group facilitation skills package. This training covered sixteen clock hours and was held on two consecutive Saturdays in May, 1993. Four of the interested parents took the class. Two others indicated that, while their spring schedules did not allow them to attend, they wanted to be invited to a later training to be held in the fall. In addition to the parents, there were six district professionals who attended, including other counselors, teachers, and a program specialist.

At the conclusion of the training, the writer challenged each trained parent to plan and present one series of lessons (eight lessons) to a small group of parents s/he knows within the community. She had hoped that these presentations could take place before the end of the school year, but because of the late start, to do seemed logistically impractical. Parents were encouraged to plan meetings early in the fall.

Fall, 1993

When school resumed in the fall, the counselor contacted each of the people trained in May. Her task at that point was to monitor, support, encourage, and assist, when necessary, in planning and scheduling the actual lessons presented to parents.

An open house was scheduled at the school in late September. After speaking together, the trained parent facilitators and the counselor decided to have information booths at the open house. One booth was set up in the media center. The second booth was part of the program planned for Spanish speaking parents during open house. As a result of these booths, several parents indicated a desire to attend parenting classes. Two series of classes will begin in October, one in Spanish, and one in English.

Besides her role to monitor, support, encourage, and assist those parents already trained, the counselor also responded to requests from her school and the neighboring junior high school for information about the Parent to Parent Program. She spoke at P.T.O. meetings at both schools in September. As a result of those meetings, the program was expanded to include parents from the junior high school. The P.T.O. board at the counselor's school has requested an update of parenting classes offered by the trained facilitators, with the

possibility of including a more formal presentation at a P.T.O. meeting in the spring.

A second facilitator training was held the end of September, 1993. At that time one additional school parent, who also has children at the neighboring junior high school, was trained, along with other district teachers, counselors, and specialists.

Chapter V

Results, Discussion, and Recommendations

Results

The predicted results of this practicum were as follows:

1. More total parents would attend Parent to Parent than the total who indicated that they attend parent groups or classes on the November, 1992 survey.
2. Some of those attending Parent to Parent will be those who report that they do not normally attend traditional parent meetings, such as P.T.O. meetings.
3. Additionally, parents who attend Parent to Parent would be asked if they felt that the program had met their expectations in terms of their receiving the information and assistance for which they were looking.

The results were not as expected:

1. Due to logistical delays in getting materials, setting up training times amenable to most participants, the need to accommodate district personnel in the facilitator trainings, and, perhaps most importantly, the end of one school year and the beginning of the next, only five school parents were

trained as facilitators. By the end of the implementation period of this practicum, while several parent classes were scheduled to begin, none had taken place within the targeted school.

2. On the plus side, four of the five participants in facilitator training indicated that they have not been actively involved in the more traditional parent groups such as P.T.O.
3. Additionally, all five stated that the Parent to Parent program met or exceeded their expectations. All five have committed to present at least two complete series of Parent to Parent classes within the school years 1993 to 1994 and 1994 to 1995.

Discussion

While the writer had hoped to reach some parents who perceive their child(ren) as having had academic and/or behavioral problems, concern had been expressed as to the appropriateness of asking such a question on the evaluation form. The reason for this concern was that the groups are by design small, and therefore, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee anonymity to the class participants. As a result, that question was dropped from the evaluation form and was not a measured outcome. Hopefully and in the future, the counselor may be able to infer some of this information through personal knowledge of the children with whom she works vis-a-vis the attendance sign-in sheet at Parent to Parent meetings. Due to issues of confidentiality, she will not reveal this information to anyone, nor will she

document it in any formal way. The information will be used in the most generic sense to fine-tune the program to better meet the needs of all the parents at the school.

As mentioned earlier, the results were not as expected. In one sense, this was an inadequacy, as when it became clear that there would not be sufficient time to recruit and train facilitators and have them recruit and train other parents in the three month time frame of this practicum. In another sense, however, the departure from the expectations were extremely beneficial.

Some of the unexpected results of this project are as follows:

- One of the parents who had expressed interest in developing a program for parents at the school at the last minute opted out of the spring training. Instead, he ran for (and was elected to) the position of P.T.O. president for the next year. As president, he has dramatically altered the format for P.T.O. meetings. The business part of the meeting (dealing with such items as fund raising) takes place before the regular meeting. The regular meeting time is then used to present a variety of informative speakers and programs, designed to provide a more supportive atmosphere to the parents at the school. The president has even used the words "parents helping parents" when describing his new program. There is no way of knowing if, or how much, this new program design was a result of the P.T.O. president's orientation to the peer facilitator model of Parent to Parent. Perhaps it was just, in the words of Oliver (1993), "an idea whose time has come." This writer attended the September P.T.O.

meeting and was extremely impressed with the fifty plus in attendance. Whoever or whatever inspired it, it appeared to be working!

- The participation of district personnel has quickly moved the program beyond the confines of one school. Home/school liaison personnel are in the process of taking the Parent to Parent program to the community. Some examples of this are:
  1. Program specialists in the district who serve its Native American population recently presented the program to the tribal council and have 15 families signed to take part in an eight session series.
  2. Representatives from the district's English as a Second Language Program, Migrant Education Program, and an Hispanic family outreach program, are scheduling Spanish and bilingual Parent to Parent classes.
  3. Other district counselors are preparing presentations for at least five other elementary schools and three junior high schools.
- In the process of reaching out to the neighboring junior high school, this writer was invited to speak at the junior high school's monthly P.T.O. meeting. The keynote speaker at that meeting was the county superintendent of schools. After the meeting, the superintendent expressed a great interest in the peer facilitation model used by the Parent to Parent program and indicated that she would like to contact them regarding a possible program for

parents of young children attending the county's urban school for homeless families.

- The focus on parents and families has been infused throughout the school. Staff members serving on the site-based council have set goals for the school's growing commitment to the needs of the total child and his/her family. One prime example of this philosophical commitment was seen at the school's open house held recently. In addition to their meeting with their children's teachers, parents also had the opportunity to visit community service organization booths at the first annual community service awareness fair held in conjunction with the open house. Teacher counts indicate that 874 parents representing 644 families were in attendance; the campus was literally standing room only. Another indicator of the success of this fair was the booth manned by representatives of the community police department. These officers provided nearly 500 children and families with free fingerprinting and child ID cards. This gentle paradigm shift toward total family support has been welcomed by parents and staff alike.

The final and, perhaps, most important measure of the success of the project was the degree to which participants felt that the program met their expectations. One of the best ways to document this degree of success is through the words of the participants themselves, taken from the comments sections of the evaluation. Examples of these comments include the following:

> WOW! [This program] gave me courage to be in charge, specific "awareness" areas for improvement, confidence that I can improve and be a great parent. (parent)

[The program is] a practical and excellent tool for helping parents now. (counselor)

Best program I've seen. (parent liaison)

[I learned] that we as parents, if given the correct tools, have the power and ability to educate ourselves and our children in the fight against drugs. . . It really makes me realize that it is my duty as a parent to make a significant difference for my children. (parent/parent liaison)

This could help any parent, even those who have it "all together." (parent/parent liaison)

It [the program] was down to earth and easy to understand. It makes sense. (teacher)

It is so needed. It is practical. It looks like it would be a successful parenting approach. (counselor)

[I liked the] heart to heart approach for sharing information and expectations. (counselor)

. . . I think this is the best weapon we have so far to try and get the job done. (ESL specialist)

Even though this targets drug use, it really is total parenting which is the main focus of our [program]. . . there is a desperate need for this information out in "the world." We hear this all the time working with our [program] families. (Hispanic outreach program preschool teacher)

Recommendations

It became obvious after conducting two facilitator training sessions and having continued contact with these facilitators that this is a program that has been needed in the community. It seems almost redundant to recommend that the program be continued and encouraged to grow. Further work must be

done in terms of continually training new facilitators to prevent burn-out among those so trained. Continued support and encouragement for these facilitators is also a must. Finally, it is suggested that this writer work closely with the parent facilitators thus far trained in working through some of the logistical difficulties they will face in the future, such as child care, transportation, and cost.

The goal was to reach as many parents as possible by being sensitive to their needs. It was (and is) an asset that those who have been trained thus far represent such a culturally diverse group. Each participant was encouraged to adapt his/her presentation to the needs of the group he/she is teaching and to help one another as well. A bonding took place between participants during the trainings and many of them continue to report meeting with one another outside of the formal meeting to share ideas, plan presentations, and even to co-facilitate groups.

Because this has evolved into an ongoing program, this writer is keeping in close contact with the parents and other district professionals who are involved, in order to evaluate the program and to make changes as necessary. This has been done to date informally, through sharing ideas by phone, memo and meeting.

As parent facilitators complete their fall classes, the success of the program will be more formally evaluated by studying the completed evaluations forms which are to be given to every parent who attends one of these classes. Based on these evaluations and the recommendations made by the parent peer facilitators, decisions will be made regarding the continuation of this program and any modifications which might be made.

After being trained, the parents will work with the writer in scheduling their presentations of the material. This will include the logistics of a check-out

system because it is very likely that the group will be limited by access to materials. Parents will be encouraged to plan and present two full series of lessons during the next two school years. It is already evident from the comments of other district professionals who have participated in the facilitator trainings, that the program will continue to grow district-wide.

Society is changing. Such rapid change has brought a plethora of challenges to schools and the families they serve. By fostering a positive relationship between home and school, schools are better equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Appendix A

SURVEY

Please check the space that shows how frequently you attend each of the following:

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely
Monthly P.T.O. meetings			
Regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences in fall & spring			
Special conferences with a child's teacher as needed			
School sponsored social activities, such as the Ice Cream Social			
School sponsored learning activities, such as parenting classes			
Other (please describe)			

If the school were to offer parenting classes on any of the following topics, how likely is it that you would attend? Please check the appropriate space below.

	Very Likely	Maybe	Probably Not
Ways to help your child academically, such as homework			
Information on child development, (what to expect and when)			
Communication and listening skills			
Ways to help your child improve his or her behavior			
Ways to help your child avoid high risk behaviors, such as drug use, gangs, dropping out of school			
Other (please describe)			

Please check any practical things which might help you to attend a parenting class:

Transportation _____ Baby Sitting _____ Other (please describe) _____

Comments: (You may attach an additional paper if you need more space)

Appendix B

EVALUATION

1. What do you feel was the most valuable idea you learned during these meetings?

_____

_____

2. What do you feel could have been done differently?_____

_____

_____

3. What did you hope to obtain by attending these sessions?_____

_____

_____

4. Do you feel that your needs were met by these meetings? yes_____ no_____

5. The following information will help us to determine if we are reaching a wide group of parents. Your answers will be appreciated.

Ages and grade levels of your child(ren):	age:	grade in school:
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

6. Do you regularly attend meetings for parents at your school? yes____ no____

7. Do you feel that this program helped you to deal more effectively with your child(ren)? yes_____ no_____

8. Additional comments? _____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

EVALUACION DEL PROGRAMA

1. ¿Qué fue la idea de más valor que Vd. aprendió de estas juntas?_____

_____

_____

2. ¿Hay sugerencias para mejorar las clases?_____

_____

_____

3. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que hubiera querido obtener al asistir a estas juntas?_____

_____

_____

4. ¿Recibió Vd. la ayuda esperada de estas clases? Si_____ No_____

5. La siguiente información nos ayudará saber si estamos sirviendo bien a la comunidad. Gracias por su ayuda.

Edades y años escolares de sus hijos:	Edad:	Año escolar:
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

6. ¿Normalmente asiste Vd. a las juntas para los padres de su escuela?

   Si_____ No_____

7. ¿Piensa Vd. que este programa le ayudará tratar más eficazmente con sus hijos?

   Si_____ No_____

8. Comentarios adicionales:_____

_____

_____

Mil gracias por su asistencia y opiniones.

(Jones, R. & Peplow, B. P. 1993)

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